

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Topical corticosteroid phobia among parents of children with atopic dermatitis in a semirural area of Norway

Editor

Topical corticosteroids (TCS) are important in the treatment of atopic dermatitis (AD), but many parents of children with AD are sceptical to their use having heard or read about possible side-effects.¹ Such negative attitudes towards TCS are often termed TCS phobia and may lead to low treatment adherence, poor effect of treatment and reduced quality of life. Most studies on TCS phobia have been performed in large urban populations,^{2–5} and to the best of our knowledge none in Scandinavia. We wanted to study attitudes towards the use of TCS among parents of children with AD in a semirural area in Norway.

We prepared and pilot-tested a questionnaire on attitudes towards and knowledge about TCS based on other similar questionnaires.^{2,3} Questions on disease severity and age were not included. The questionnaire was sent to parents of children aged 0–10 years ($n = 127$) treated for AD in a specialist practice with two part-time dermatologists in the small town of Hønefoss, Norway (population in 2012: 14 000). Seventy-seven completed questionnaires (60%) were returned.

Forty-nine respondents (64%) reported that they worry 'much' or 'a lot' using TCS on their child. Of these, 45 reported that they did not use physician-prescribed TCS due to these worries 'very often' or 'often' ($n = 10$) or sometimes ($n = 35$). The most frequent reasons for concern were side-effects, especially thinning of the skin. Common sources of information on TCS were dermatologists (70%), general practitioners (55%), package leaflets (46%) and pharmacies (38%). Only 12 respondents (9%) were able to identify the potency of the four most commonly used TCS in Norway. Twelve respondents (9%) gave systematically incorrect answers on corticosteroid potency, possibly on the basis of the percentage declared on the package.

There was no correlation between worries regarding TCS and level of knowledge on corticosteroid potency.

Our study indicates that TCS phobia among parents of children with AD is as frequent in a small town with surrounding rural districts in Norway as in major cities in other countries.^{2–5} The study is small and undertaken without extensive validation of the questionnaire. The TOPICOP scale for evaluating TCS phobia in AD patients and their parents⁶ was published after the completion of our study. In our opinion, the term TCS phobia is a misnomer, as negative attitudes against TCS is not without some rationale; misuse of TCS may indeed lead to adverse side-effects. In their encounters with parents of children with AD, clinicians should explore parents' attitudes towards TCS to personalize patient management and avoid poor treatment adherence.

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